

PRESS CONFERENCE:

**Rear Admiral Gregory Smith, Director of Communications, Deputy Spokesman,
Multi-National Force – Iraq**

**Major General Robert Allardice, Commander, Coalition Air Force Transition
Team**

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PARTICIPANTS:

RDML SMITH

MAG GEN ALLARDICE

REPORTERS:

REP1-5

***REP1 = REPORTER 1**

***INT = INTERPRETER**

RDML SMITH: Good afternoon. As-Salāmu `Alaykum. It is my pleasure to be joined today by Major General Robert Allardice, United States Air Force, who is the Commander of the Coalition Air Force Transition Team leading efforts to equip, train and stand up the Iraqi Air Force. As the Iraqi Security Forces continue to take more responsibility, Major General Allardice and his team's efforts are becoming more and more important. We're fortunate to have him today with us to talk a bit about how the Iraqi Air Force is progressing. General Allardice will be departing Iraq after twelve months in the job. At the conclusion of his remarks, we'll be happy to take your questions.

The hard work by Iraqis is one reason the security situation is improving. Although, as we have stated before, there's still have considerable work to be done. Another reason is the increases in capability that initiated in 2007 to improve population security in Baghdad and across Iraq. The most visible increase was the recruiting and training of nearly 125,000 additional Iraqi soldiers and police officers willing to stand up and protect their country against violence and extremism. As General Allardice can attest, the surge is not just measured in numbers, but also in the increasing capacity and capabilities of the armed forces of Iraq. Iraqi citizens also surged, with over 90,000 rejecting terror and joining citizen

volunteer groups, first out west in Anbar, and now across much of Iraq. Coalition forces surged as well, bringing in five additional reinforcing brigades to help create the security conditions that would allow for non-security related progress in Iraq. This week, Multi-National Corps – Iraq announced that one of those coalition brigades is redeploying back to its home base, returning the soldiers to their families after 15 months of service here in Iraq. Approximately 2,000 paratroopers of the 2nd Brigade of the 82nd Airborne Division will head home to Fort Bragg in North Carolina over the next several weeks. When this redeployment is complete, the number of American combat brigades here in Iraq will go from 19 to 18, with three more brigades scheduled to redeploy by this July. On behalf of the men and women of MNF-I, I want to thank the 2nd Brigade for their service here in Iraq, and for the sacrifices they made for the freedom we, and all Iraqis, hold so dear. The sacrifices of the 2nd Brigade were joined by the heroism of the Iraqi Security Forces and of the people of Iraq, as shown by the increasing quality and quantity of the operations it is conducting. And more and more citizen volunteer groups are working ever closer with then security forces and the coalition to deny terrorists safe havens and weapons. On February 28th, the Sons of Iraq based in Sabbah Nissan, a village located southeast of Baghdad, found a large cache of weapons and turned it over to coalition force

soldiers. This find of dangerous munitions represents the thirteenth cache the Sabbah Nissan Sons of Iraq have helped seize since the group was formed late last year. They are not alone. On March 2nd, sheikhs from the Diyala area acted as intermediaries between terrorists who wanted to reconcile with Iraqi and coalition forces. The sheikhs said they had been approached by a man wanted to end his association with al-Qaida and turn over a new leaf. His job was to guard the terrorists' stockpile of weapons and explosives in his village. He offered to turn over the cache in exchange for forgiveness and acceptance back into the community. His information led security forces to a large brick structure buried in the desert. It was a significant find: missile systems, wire-guided missiles, almost 200 rocket-propelled grenades, rockets, anti-tank missiles, 22 50-pound containers of homemade explosives, TNT, and sticks of dynamite, C-4 explosives, hand grenades, ammunition and machine guns. The actions of this one man saved untold lives, and his rejection of terrorism is occurring again and again across Iraq. In Adwaniyah on March 3rd and 4th, Coalition force soldiers captured two weapon caches and detained three suspected terrorists during an operation that resulted from local citizens standing up against extremism. One of the citizen volunteers attempted to recruit his colleagues to engage in terrorism. Other Sons of Iraq immediately informed their sheikh, who alerted coalition forces.

Resulting raids seized a large stockpile of munitions and other bomb-making materials. We're seeing increasing cooperation between the Iraqi people and those who are trying to protect them. On March 4th, in eastern Baghdad, Iraqi and coalition security forces received a tip from a local citizen about a stash of rockets and Iranian-made Explosively Formed Penetrators. Coalition forces responded and took the weapons off of the streets. Also on March 4th, local residents and security volunteers in Arab Jabour turned over four more weapons caches to Coalition force soldiers. And on the 5th, two more weapons caches were turned over in Arab Jabour. Finally, on March 4th, Iraqi police seized a large weapons and munitions cache in Jabellah, to the south of Iskandariyah. A local police officer discovered the cache in a house in Jabellah and brought in provincial Iraqi security force soldiers to dispose of the cache. They worked with coalition forces to safely dispose of the weaponry and explosives. Among the items captured were 165 blocks of C-4, 19 rocket-propelled grenades, 25 107-mm high-explosive rockets and mortar rounds of varying sizes. The C-4 and 107-mm rockets were assessed to have been produced in Iran sometime in 2007. It's not just weapons that the Iraqi Security Forces and citizen volunteers are capturing in Iraq. On March 5th in Baghdad, Iraqi Army soldiers, working with Sons of Iraq from Qadisiyah, detained three al-Qaida terrorists in the Mansour

neighborhood. Later that day, other Iraqi Security Force soldiers operating with Sons of Iraq from Amiriyah, captured an al-Qaida member suspected of illegal activity, also in Mansour. Also March 5th, a leader of a volunteer group based in northern Zambraniyah provided intelligence that led to a joint operation. The leader, who oversees about 300 fellow citizens, led his group to support coalition forces who conducted raids based on a tip. While clearing houses together in the early morning, the joint patrol came under small arms fire. Coalition soldiers noticed a man dressed entirely in black fleeing the scene. They pursued and detained the man, and discovered nearby an al-Qaida torture house. The house was rigged with an electrocution system, bare wires connecting an on/off switch to handcuffs attached to window parts, as well as hooks used to hang victims from the walls, one of which was marked with a bloody handprint. Twelve Arabic language manuals on interrogation and terrorist activities, interrogation activities were also seized. But not every story in Iraq turns out this way. Al-Qaida and other extremists still have the capability to carry out attacks that kill innocent civilians. We see this all too often. But it is this indiscriminate violence that is leading more and more Iraqis to reject the violent extremism and the groups that represent that, and to work with their government to bring about an end to the reign of terror. To fully bring security and stability to their country,

Iraq will need armed forces that are capable of fighting their country's enemies and providing for their own command and control, intelligence, and logistics. Assisting in this vital effort is Major General Robert Allardice and his team, who are helping the Iraqi Air Force achieve their goals. General.

**MAJ GEN
ALLARDICE:**

Thank you, Admiral Smith. As Admiral Smith indicated, in 2007, we saw significant growth in the Iraqi Security Forces, both in size and in capability. Working with the Multi-National Security Transmission Command and underneath them, it has been my pleasure to serve with the Iraqi Air Force. In 2007, we saw significant growth in Iraqi Air Force. If you go back to January of 2007, the air force was in an embryonic state. In fact, a year ago, when I arrived in Iraq in March, the Iraqi Air Force had no interim Air Force Academy. They had no basic training capability. They had no technical training capability, and they were flying very few sorties, less than 30 sorties a week. In January of this year, the Iraqi Air Force has started the Air Force Academy. They'd started the basic training course. They'd started the technical training school, and they increased the size of their fleet and their sorties. In fact, in January, the Iraqi Air Force was flying three hundred sorties per week, which is a 1,000% increase in the number of sorties a week that they fly. Can I go to the slide please?

During 2007, the types of airplanes that the Iraqis were both operating and procuring increased significantly. In December of 2007, the Iraqi Air Force acquired its first of several King Air aircraft. The King Air 350, the first one they have, is a cargo...small cargo transportation aircraft. And starting in late spring this year, they'll have five more of those that are intelligence/surveillance/reconnaissance-equipped aircraft. In this month, the Iraqi Air Force is going to see a significant increase as they acquire an additional set of helicopter aircraft, more training aircraft to bring up the size of their fleet. And let me describe this to you. In October of 2007, the Iraqi Air Force started pilot training. Prior to that time, they didn't have any capability inside of Iraqi to train the pilots. And as we've discussed in this forum before, the Air Force is a very technical, complex thing to run. But to start a pilot training during a counterinsurgency is an amazing thing. In October, the Iraqi Air Force started pilot training. The first class had four Second Lieutenants in the course, and six instructor pilots. Within one month, the instructor pilots—Iraqi instructor pilots—were teaching their own Iraqi students to fly. And by December, all four of those had soloed. Where a year ago we had no training aircraft, at this time we have six, the Iraqi Air Force has six Cessna 172 aircraft. And this month, they'll get two more Cessna 172 aircraft and the first of five Cessna 208 aircraft,

which will increase their training capacity. By the end of this year, the Iraqi Air Force will have grown. Where last year at this time there were about 750 people, and today there are about 1,350 people. They have 400 additional people in their training pipeline today, and by the end of this year, we expect them to be just right around 3,000 people. In terms of capability and times of missions, then, the Iraqi Air Force at this time regularly flies with their helicopter missions, missions in support of the infrastructure protection, both the oil and electric pipelines. They fly resupply missions, both helicopter and C-130 cargo aircraft and the King Air aircraft. In addition to that, the Iraqi Air Force has significantly increased their intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance capability, and they now fly multiple sorties every week with serving the border control, the infrastructure protection, and the Iraqi Army.

I'd like to remind you that running an Air Force is a very complex environment, a very complex operation. It takes two to three years to actually take a young officer and make them a certified pilot. But we're very proud and pleased with the progress we've seen with the Iraqi Air Force. That concludes my comments, and I'll be glad to take any questions you may have.

RDML SMITH: Questions please. Yes, sir.

REP1: Asking question in Arabic.

INT: When do you think you can equip the Iraqi government with F-16 or F-18 or -15 and -16? And the second question to Admiral Smith. Do you have any evidence that the Iranian government is involved in the violence, besides the flow of Iranian weapons? Do you have any further evidence?

MAJ GEN ALLARDICE: Can I ask you to repeat the first question?

REP1: Asking question in Arabic.

INT: The question is when do you, when can you equip Iraq with fighting jets like F-16, F-15?

MAJ GEN ALLARDICE: The question on when we can, Iraq can equip themselves with fighting aircraft like an F-16. First off, they are already acquiring fighting type aircraft. You don't necessarily have to have a supersonic jet, a fighter, in order to fight in the counterinsurgency. In fact, our focus with the Iraqi Air Force right now is to build up a force that will support the government in the counterinsurgency.

mission. So, by the end of this year, they'll have a...what we call a "kinetic ability," the ability to strike from the air to the ground in support of counterterrorist mission and the army mission. That has been predominantly our focus here at the beginning, to build up the training base and build up the counterinsurgency base. The question on when Iraq can acquire supersonic jet aircraft is really a...the answer to that question is it depends on when the government wants to make that type of an investment. As you know, it's a again very complex, very expensive to build up something like an F-16. And it takes multiple years to acquire that capability. Certainly, the capability within the pilots, both from the former Iraqi Air Force and the young pilots we train today, they have the sophistication and the capability to learn in that direction. It's just a matter of time and money.

RDML SMITH: Regarding your question on Iran. It would appear that inside of Iran, there are still groups and elements that are supporting the training and financing of criminal elements here inside of Iraq. And we have briefed on multiple occasions the role that these groups inside of Iran are playing to support the special groups with training inside of Iran, the delivery of capability through that training that's then exported back into Iraq, the funding of the activities of these special groups, as well as the, in some cases, the supplying of arms

and munitions. The discovery of the caches that we continue to find on the battlefield today, some of which are fairly new in terms of its manufacture of the weapon itself, suggests that the activity of the training and financing, when added together with the constant flow of weapons into this country, makes for a very volatile and dangerous situation. The Iranian government has expressed its pledge publicly and privately to support the peaceful transition here in Iraq. And we would certainly look for all elements inside of Iran to adhere to those public statements. Shukran. Yes, sir.

REP2: Asking question in Arabic.

INT: Question to General Allardice. You've mentioned that there will be some training for the pilots. What about the...do you think that, can you rely on former Iraqi pilots or the new ones that you will train? Is it possible to rely on the old Iraqi pilots? Or will you train new ones?

MAJ GEN ALLARDICE: We rely on both. In fact, the instructor pilots who we have today, I described were from the former Iraqi Air Force. I was really proud and pleased with how quickly they requalified to be instructors and how much they wanted to train their own young fledging pilots. So, today we have 18 lieutenants in pilot training that are being trained

by the Iraqi instructors and coalition instructors. But they are very eager pilots. Both the older pilots and the younger pilots are very professional, very aggressive, and they'll all make great pilots. Of course, the young pilots want to believe they'll be better than the older pilots. But, I think that's natural.

RDML SMITH: Thank you. All the way in the back. And we'll work our way forward.

REP3: Asking question in Arabic.

INT: Question from Radio Sawa. Admiral Smith, question to Admiral Smith. There are some attacks that the attacks recently increased in Baghdad. Could you...could you give us a percentage of the up-tick in these attacks and who's responsible behind those attacks? Question to General Allardice. The Iraqi Air Force is now limited, and the operations that it does is limited. When do you think you can equip the Iraqi Army so that it will be able to conduct offensive operations against al-Qaida?

RDML SMITH: Well, first of all, I think we need to continue to look at historically what has happened over the last year to really put in perspective a one week or two weeks worth of activity inside Baghdad. I mean,

you consider the violence of violence a year ago—not only in Baghdad, but across Iraq—in terms of numbers of attacks on any given day, let alone a week or a month, it was very, very, very high. Those numbers, as we've all discussed and you all know and live have dropped dramatically. That said, on any given day, al-Qaida and other extremist groups are still very much disposed towards handing out violence indiscriminately to achieve whatever means and ends they hope to achieve with those attacks. I would not look at the last few weeks as an increase or a trend of an increase. But there has been a sporadic series of events that have occurred by attacking civilians predominantly that have resulted, regrettably, in a significant loss of life in two particular instances, with the market bombings, the Alboreen attack down in Karbala, of course, not inside Baghdad, but then most recently in Karada. Those attacks were the responsibility of al-Qaida in all three of those cases. And their motivations are no different than what they've been all along, and that is to intimidate the population, to...through that intimidation achieve its agenda, despite how twisted that agenda is and how it does not fit the Iraqi people's agenda. But they understand that the violence in Baghdad is a principal means to achieve those goals. It makes headlines. It draws attention. And that's the purpose of using that kind of violence. We have every expectation that there will be bad days to come in the future, days in

which we'll mourn the loss of not only our, the Iraqi citizen, but also our own soldiers as well. Unfortunate that the al-Qaida and other extremist groups do not understand the value of working towards a peaceful transition in Iraq, but instead would use violence to achieve their means...their ends. And we and the Iraqi Security Forces are committed to reducing that level of violence, not only in Baghdad, but across Iraq. Shukran.

**MAJ GEN
ALLARDICE:**

Your question on the involvement of the Iraqi Air Force against al-Qaida. First off, already the Iraqi Air Force works with the army to attack al-Qaida or the insurgents. In November, the Cessna Caravan, which is a intelligence/surveillance/reconnaissance platform manned by an Iraqi aircrew worked, with an Iraqi Army battalion in the north in order to locate, fix, find a IED factory and helped the Iraqi Army arrest the people who were involved in that effort. That's one example. There are several examples of the Iraqi Air Force finding and locating and calling in the police for people who are trying to steal oil, are trying to destroy the electrical lines. So there's already a effort supporting the army in the counterinsurgency. And I think that's really important in, and as you can imagine, when the pilots come back from a mission like that, they are very excited, because they know that they've contributed. What we'll see is a continuing building in that

capability. Today, there's still 56 airplanes which they're flying a fair amount for that small number of airplanes. But that number will almost double by the end of December. Some of those airplanes have more of an offensive capability, the ability to shoot, and they'll be even more involved with a direct application of weapons against the terrorists.

RDML SMITH: I think right here. Yes, sir. Third row back.

REP4: Asking question in Arabic.

INT: Question from al-Fayha TV. Question to Admiral Smith. What about the Iranian-American dialogue? And the question's about the Iranian-American dialogue. And the other question, do you think that...or some say that the coalition forces and the American side were happy for the ceasefire issued by Muqtada al-Sadr. But what about the decision made by Muqtada al-Sadr to exclude himself from the politicians? So, what do you think is the future of the JAM right now?

RDML SMITH: First of all, the dialogue is not between the US and Iran. It's a dialogue that's really between the Iraqi government and the Iranian government for which we've been invited to participate in. Those

discussions, which have happened in the past have all been, again, designed around what can Iran and Iraq do to move forward positively in that relationship of providing security inside of Iraq. So, to characterize, I think that's a more appropriate characterization. The next round of that discussion, again, hosted by the Government of Iraq, invited the US to those discussions. That date has not been set. And the US looks forward to an opportunity to once again sit down along with our Iraqi brothers and discuss openly and transparently with the Iranians how they can participate here inside of Iraq in a very positive and constructive way. As for the ceasefire, again a positive step in the right direction for would it become a movement that had a considerable amount of negative and violence associated with it. When you consider what happened in Karbala last August, that I think drew the attention of not only the Shia but the world and the role being played in, again, in a negative way when violence is used to solve problems. Muqtada al-Sadr and the Sadr trend chose to move forward in a path of political and nonviolent way to move forward their agenda through this ceasefire. It's now in its second six month of extension. And I think that the movement of the Sadr trend towards a social and welfare and political agenda is an appropriate one. And the role that Muqtada al-Sadr himself plays in that is of his choosing. And what we really are concerned with here is what is

the greater benefit of having the Sadr trend aligned with a, again, a peaceful democratic process as opposed to a violent one. And we think that's a positive dimension and a positive step. Thank you.

Fourth row.

REP5: Asking question in Arabic.

INT: Thank you. Question from al-Sabah newspaper. You always say that there are some EFPs that are being used to attack the Multi-National Forces and the Iraqi Security Forces. But the Iranian president in his visit said a few days ago...he denied those allegations and said that those things are not true. And he said that Iran can contribute in enhancing the situation in Iraq. So why is there is this contradiction between what you say and what the Iranian president say? This is the question to General Allardice about developing the Iraqi Air Force. You've mentioned that in about a year, the Iraqi Air Force will also support the ground forces. So, if the Iraqi Air Force managed to do that, do you think this will reduce the amount of coalition forces or coalition soldiers inside Iraq? Thank you.

RDML SMITH: The most appropriate way I think to answer your question is to simply not describe it words but describe it in actions. And we

have provided to you very clearly the actions of, again, elements inside Iran who it's clear are arming, training, and equipping and financing activities of criminal elements here inside of Iraq. Those are not statements that we make. Those are, that's the evidence that we provided countless times here in this room and elsewhere. And we'll continue to provide that information to you all when appropriate. And we have shared that very same information, the information from detainees, for instance, several of which were detained this past fall in the months of October, November, and December, having recently returned from Iran, having been trained inside of Iran by elements inside that country. Those detainees, Iraqis, all speak the same story. They all tell exactly the same involvement of handlers here inside of Iraq that move them into Iran specifically for training, how they were trained inside of Iran by Lebanese Hezbollah and other trainers, the training that specific they received in paramilitary activities, and that they were sent back here purposely, purposefully to support anti-coalition, anti-security, and obviously anti-peace and stability of Iraq. That's undeniable. Again, those aren't our assertions. Those are the exact facts associated with the Iraqis themselves who have provided that information to us. And sharing that with you, I think, is the most visible way of we have describing precisely what's happening inside of Iran. And we'll continue to do that and again in the weeks

to come.

**MAJ GEN
ALLARDICE:**

On your question on the support to the ground forces. First off, that is happening today. The Iraqi Air Force is supporting the ground forces today, and they'll continue to grow in that type of support and the intensity of support. Since last summer, the Iraqi Air Force deployed helicopters down to Basra to fly support missions and presence missions down in Basra. They started with the Huey-2 and then in December they used the MI-17 in that mission. They do that regularly. That is a type of support. And the intensity of that support will continue to grow. Your question on the connection of that with the coalition. I would frame this that we see the effectiveness of the Iraqi military growing almost on a daily basis. They are very capable, and combined operations with the air force and the army in any nation, as you become a combined arms...have a combined arms capability, that makes you more effective. And certainly the partnership that we have and the mutual agreement on how we proceed is something that the coalition leadership, along with the Iraqi leadership, will look at.

RDML SMITH:

Thank you. Next question. Well, if not, I appreciate you coming. I thank you for your time here today. And if we've got any follow-up questions, I'd be happy to take them afterwards. Thank you.